

Thanks for nothing! (again)

Two of the Sheffield Post Offices axed by Royal Mail in their widespread closure programmes of last year are to re-open in Sheffield. Good news, right? Not really. Considering Sheffield City Council leader Paul Scriven's earlier vocal opposition to these post office closures and his pledge to save them all, this is all a case of too little too late.

The two branches, Oakbrook Road in Nether Green and Park Grange at Norfolk park are to stay open till 2011, when their "viability" will be re-assessed.

It is clear to us at the Fargate Speaker, and we'd hope to you too, that this is just a temporary situation and will do nothing to stop the relentless privatization



City Councillor Paul Scriven - about as useful as a kick in the bollox.

of what used to be staple community services. And even if these two offices remain open, what of the many other communities that are still left in the lurch? Residents of Crookes, Walkley,

Ecclesall, Sharrow and elsewhere are still left short-changed by this whole episode. The inability of our Council to properly represent the views and priorities of regular working class people and their surrender to privatisation shows how much trust we can really put in them.

The same goes for our national politicians, Liberal Democrat leader and Sheffield Hallam MP Nick Clegg described the situation as "a shame". It's nice to know we have such committed politicians working on our behalf.

There is a silver lining to this however. The campaign of Sheffield Communities Against Post Office Closures is a great example of how communities can work together, without any need for bureaucrats or politicians, to come up with real solutions. Their ideas of decentralised, community-run post office networks are the sort of thinking that is needed in this era of privatisation and public service closure.

Fargate Review

Fargate review provides an entertaining overview of some of the city's lesser known attractions. This issue we share our star pick of Sheffield's abandoned buildings:



1. Probably the creepiest abandoned building in Sheffield, this empty church is ripe for midnight exploring complete with ripped up hymn books and decapitated dolls heads strewn around various rooms to really cultivate that slasher movie feel. It has also been host to some epic free parties in spite of a decidedly dodgy roof.

2. Shops. With the economic crisis beginning to bite many of the less competitive retailers have shut down. But don't fret we are positive that that empty Woolworths (what was it they sold again?) will be replaced by yet another Starbucks any day now...

3. Introducing the most secured derelict building in the city. Matilda used to be a thriving, squatted social centre boasting a cafe, gig space, art gallery and many more community projects. Realising the obvious threat that this posed, the powers that be invested their time and money in evicting the social centre collective, installing CCTV and bricking up windows and doorways. Let that be a warning to anyone who might dare think of using empty space for something useful again!

THE FARGATE SPEAKER

Let's dance.

Freedom • Equality • Solidarity
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In This Issue: Lib Dems - What are they good for?, More Economic Crisis for Dummies, Post Office closures (cont.), Careers Fair Disruption, plus much more....

A Bridge Too Far

East Midlands Trains have launched an attack on free space and freedom of movement in Sheffield, closing off public access to our railway station. Their plans to install ticket gates at the bridge through Sheffield station, cutting off access to a vital route, have faced determined opposition from the grassroots group Residents Against Station Closure, and a poll on the subject found 95% of Sheffield residents opposed it, but EMT have refused to listen to objections. They claimed they were going into negotiations, and then suddenly closed the route off without issuing any warning. Residents of Norfolk Hill and Park Hill, and anyone using the tram stop at the back of the station, will be forced to use a longer and more inconvenient route, making life much harder for disabled people and those with young children.

But this issue doesn't just affect them: it's a sign of a much larger and

more worrying trend.

A spokesman for East Midlands trains said that "a line had to be drawn", and we agree - by making this decision, EMT have put their profit margins ahead of the views of the 2,076 Sheffielders who signed a petition opposing the barrier, and we can't let them get away with it. It raises serious questions about democracy when a scheme so universally unpopular with pretty much everyone can be pushed through. As for our elected representatives, MP Richard Caborn boasts that he's "told them not to do a daft thing like this again", but what're the chances



of them actually listening to him? If we're going to defend the principle that public needs come before private profit, it'll take more than fine words from politicians - we need to build a large and militant movement, capable of scaring the arrogance out of bosses who'll never listen to our views unless they're forced to.

For more information about Residents Against Station Closure their website address is: www.rasc-sheffield.com

Anti-militarists disrupt careers fair

At the beginning of this month Sheffield students targeted military recruiters and arms dealers at the University's Spring careers fair, demanding they have a say over who is allowed on campus. The stalls of QinetiQ, Rolls Royce, the Army and the Navy were all dismantled with protesters bagging up materials from the stalls and removing them from campus. The careers fairs, held in university buildings, are events run by private companies for a profit and often include employers such as the Army, Navy, Rolls Royce and Qinetiq. Rolls Royce is renowned for its arms deals providing billions of pounds of weapons to countries (including dictatorships like Saudi Arabia) across the world every year. Students also protested about the military, including the Army and Navy,

being allowed on campus. These institutions continue with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while advertising nice safe jobs and luring graduates in with promises of free further training which is in fact given in return for years of service. Rolls Royce is one of the top investors in the university, investing in research which ultimately is used in weapons manufacture, students at-tacking the company felt education and expertise should not be used for arms companies purely because they are willing to pile money into it! Students and staff should have a say in how money is spent and where funding comes from instead of the university being run as a business in the interests of profit. The university has repeatedly refused to listen to the large body of students at staff

who wish to end the university's ties with the military and arms trade.

Bus workers strike?

Once again the bosses of First South Yorkshire are fearing for their wallets as 403 out of 445 bus workers voted in favour of a ballot for strike. The troubles arise from a union official being sacked unfairly. One of the issues the strike will be against is the harshness of the disciplinary procedures in place. However, the fact that these issues occurred nearly two months ago signals that not a lot is going to be done and for the time being we're going to have to put up with our overpriced, underserved bus routes.

Fargate poses the question....

The Lib Dems - What are they good for?

Seriously, what is the point of the Lib Dems? As far as anyone can tell, their main selling point seems to be that they're not Labour or the Tories – so basically, like the BNP for people who aren't racists. And if you think that sounds useless, you'd be right. It is undeniably the case that, unlike their two main rivals, they've never been trusted with much power, so they've never had the opportunity to make any really disastrously bad decisions, but then again I've never started a war or bugged up the economy, and you don't see me claiming that I should be trusted to run the country as a result.

But what do they actually have to say for themselves? One of their biggest boasts is that they've spent nearly half a million pounds on 15 extra Police Community Support Officers. You can debate whether or not more cops are a good investment, but it's hard to deny that PCSOs are utterly useless – they're not even real cops, they can't join the Police Federation, and can only make citizen's arrests the same as anyone else, they're not trusted enough to carry batons or CS spray, and South Yorkshire ones don't even have handcuffs. But they are allowed to carry rubber gloves. Basically, they're no different from anyone else having a stroll around the place, except the Lib Dems are paying half a million quid for 15 of them. They're not



Lib Dem community activists admire artwork provided by local youth.

there to tackle proper crimes like rape or murder, most of their duties consist of things like hassling beggars or stopping people littering – we can all agree litter is a bad thing, but is it really that far up the list of problems the world faces today?

Their councillor Sylvia Anginotti actually boasts that they “pressure” the government to provide more help to “the business community” - i.e. bosses. They claim that they've helped persuade the government to lower business rates – so in other words, money that could be used to pay for schools, hospitals, or even more of the useless fake cops they seem so keen on will instead be staying in the pockets of rich business owners. And they seem to think this is something to be proud of.

Even more inexplicably, they've refused to even discuss a government offer of £370,000 to help fund free swimming

for pensioners and children – although presumably if the children involved were re-branded as Youth Police Swimming Pool Support Officers, they'd be all for it. They've also pushed through pay cuts for low-paid workers like nursery staff while hiring two new managers on £50,000 salaries – a decision Labour went along with at the time, and then criticised once it'd been made in an attempt to score points. And they've cut funding for community groups – after all, who needs to encourage a genuine sense of community when you can just throw cash at ever-increasing numbers of fake bobbies?

At a time like this, genuine alternatives to the status quo are desperately needed, but the Lib Dems' uninspiring record makes it very clear that they have no real alternative to offer. Lib Dems – what are they good for? ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!

The Economic Crisis FOR DUMMIES

Guess who foots the bill...

The recession is here. We're told to tighten our belts and brace ourselves for redundancies, wage and service cuts. A recession is simply when the economy shrinks for 6 months in a row. What this means for individual firms is a squeeze on profits, and we can be certain that unless we do anything about it, that's going to mean a squeeze on us, as our employers try to protect those profits. Politicians and business leaders are united in saying we should pay for a crisis not of our making. So how is the recession going to affect us?

Redundancies

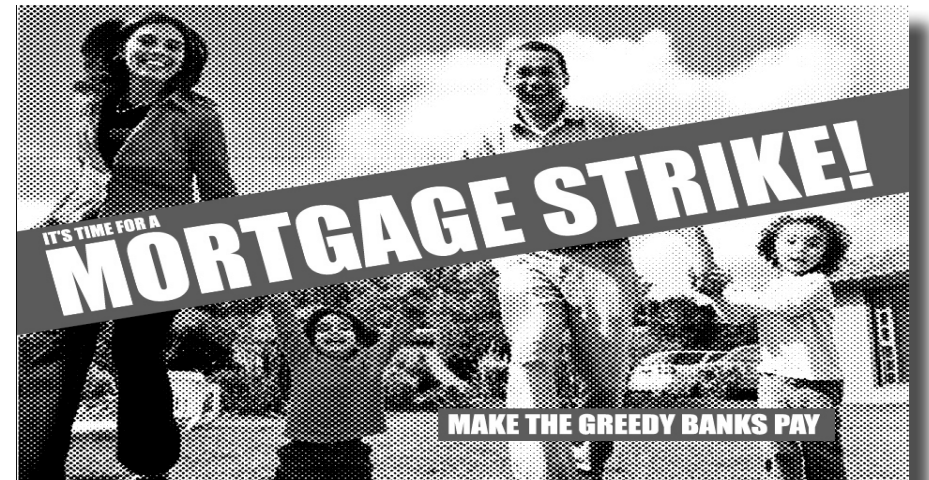
One way in which the cost of the crisis is passed onto us is through redundancies. Unemployment is predicted to increase to as much as 3m in the next couple of years. This means over a million people will lose their jobs. Already the news is full of layoffs, and it's set to get worse.

Unemployment

Not content with mass layoffs, just when the economy is proving incapable of keeping people in work, the government is planning to cut benefits bills by punishing unemployed people for not finding jobs! A recent report recommended that unemployed workers should be made to either look for work or do community service “from 9 to 5” in order to earn their £60 dole money. That works out at £1.50 an hour! Of course, the whole point of a recession is there's not many jobs to look for.

Wage cuts

Those of us who keep our jobs can't expect to escape the punishment. Wages can be cut in less visible ways too. If workers can be made to work harder and faster, or longer days or through their breaks, we end up doing more work for the same pay. This will often be making up for the work of colleagues made redundant, saving the boss cash. Whenever your boss asks you to “give 110 percent for the team,” this is what they have in mind. Of course we pay the price in stress and burnout, but at least we've got a job, right?



Public service cuts

A further £35bn of the government clawbacks are scheduled to come from public sector spending cuts. This will mean cuts to public services and further attacks on public sector workers pay and conditions. Of course if you can afford private healthcare this probably won't bother you. For the rest of us it's bad news.

Repossessions and evictions

Another way the recession will hit us is through a rise in home repossessions and evictions as people fall behind on mortgage repayments and rent. Repossessions are already at record levels, and set to rise further. The absurdity is we could see people being chucked out on the street while houses stand empty and can't be sold.

Is it all doom and gloom?

It doesn't have to be! If we're honest, we're not in a very strong position and we're likely to take the brunt of this crisis unless we set about changing that. There are various things we can do, ranging from simple things you're probably doing already to daring acts of collective action to win the things we need. So...

Talk to your workmates - on your breaks or in the pub after work. We're all in the same boat, just realising this is a step towards doing something about it. Beware bosses claiming they're in the same boat too; who do you think they'd throw overboard first?

Consider collective action. Collective action covers a whole range of things, but the principle is that while on our own we are weak, when we act together we can achieve more than the sum of our parts. Examples include going in a group to the manager's office to

support colleagues being made redundant or pressured into working longer or harder. There's safety in numbers. It's easier to say no to the boss when you know your workmates are doing the same.

More dramatically, things like occupations can win major concessions. When workers were laid off at a factory in Northern Ireland recently they occupied the plant for 48 hours demanding improved redundancy terms. They won. By acting together they turned the tables on the bosses, who expected them to go home alone and “think things over.” Instead they showed the inevitable wasn't so inevitable. It isn't always easy to take collective action, but it starts from realising what we have in common with other workers, and what we don't have in common with the politicians and bosses. We can't fight back on our own, but together we have a chance.